



The Clipper Visits...Cissy Greenbaum

By MARTHA HIMES

To work in Westwinds Bookshop, you have to be able to handle interruptions really well.

"You get used to it. I love it when it's busy," said Cissy Greenbaum, Westwinds' owner.

Even in the late afternoon, the store is bustling. One staff person is ringing up a sale, another is stocking the shelves, and the third is helping a customer choose a book. And Greenbaum is digging unshelved-as-yet Hanukkah cards out of the back office for another customer.



Cissy Greenbaum

Greenbaum purchased the store in 1998, after working there for six years with the previous owner, Nancy Blake. Initially, she wasn't sure she wanted to buy it, as she knew

running the store would be a lot of work. And while it is even more work than she had anticipated, she loves it.

"You can create your own atmosphere when you own a shop... I can set the tone of this shop to be the kind, loving, friendly space that it is," Greenbaum said.

The downside to owning the bookstore is that the work she loves to do is the work she does the least now, helping people find the right book. Instead, she spends much of her day doing managerial and administrative tasks.

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But she is careful to hire staff who are knowledgeable about books and able to track down requests, even requests as unspecific as "I want a book like this one."

"They [the staff] have to read, they have to be quick, they have to remember, they have to research. We do a lot of research," she said.

Since buying Westwinds, Greenbaum has formed a partnership with the Duxbury Free Library. Together, the library and Westwinds host Author Talks, where well-known and less-well-known authors read from their books and answer audience questions. Previous Author Talks have featured such authors as Anita Shreve, Claire Cook and Elizabeth McCracken.

"I have tried to continue the tradition of Westwinds by having interesting authors come, whether they're local and no one's heard of them, or whether they're national authors that everyone's heard of," she said. "The authors that have no fame

are oftentimes more fascinating than the ones who have been running the national circuit."

For 2003, they are working on lining up Derrick Bell, ethicist and author of *Ethical Ambition: Living a Life of Meaning and Worth*, and Elinor Lipman, author of novels such as *Inn at Lake Devine*.

Greenbaum stocks the shop carefully, keeping in mind her customers and their reading habits.

"You know your clientele, so you try to buy what you think your clientele will want to read about. I try to have a good quality of books, things that people are really happy to read. And with my children's books, I'm very picky about what I bring in. You want to buy something that's enriching," she said.

If Westwinds doesn't stock the book you seek, they will special order it for you. They order books on Wednesdays and Sundays: Wednesday orders arrive on Friday and Sunday orders arrive on Tuesday. During the busy holiday sea-

son, they often order more frequently.

"And then if they [the distribution houses] don't have it, we have someone who once a week calls the publisher and orders one book from one publisher, another book from another publisher," she said. "We pay an exorbitant amount in freight to get those books in, but we do it as a service to our customers."

For gifts for those hard-to-please relatives out of town, Greenbaum can supply BookSense gift certificates, which are valid at BookSense-affiliated independent booksellers all over the United States.

BookSense is a coalition of independent booksellers sponsored by the American Booksellers Association. Westwinds has a directory of BookSense stores, so you can check to see if your loved ones have a store nearby.

Greenbaum also supplies gift suggestions. She'll go through your whole gift list with you, ask you about the personalities involved, and make book suggestions based on the information you give her. She'll even gift-wrap and ship those gifts.

Unsurprisingly, Greenbaum is an avid reader. "I love books. I do this because I have a passion for books," she said. Right now she's reading Donna Tartt's new novel, *The Little Friend*.

She reads about five to six books a month, depending on length and density. Her favorite books of the past year included Gail Sukiya's *A Samurai Garden* and Ann Patchett's *Bel Canto*.

While Greenbaum hesitates to make can't fail book recommendations, because of the individuality of books and readers, she does have some can't fail gift suggestions. For writers or typists, the "Page Up" plastic and sand page holders are a huge hit. Stationery and journals are also popular gift items. And Westwinds' hand-picked card selection includes everything from traditional poetic cards to the Fresh line of cards, which are considerably less traditional.

The entire Greenbaum family helps out at the bookstore. Son Matthew, 22, is taking over some of the administrative functions in the office. Until she went off to Annapolis Naval Academy this past summer, Greenbaum's daughter Rebecca, 18, helped out at the register. And Harvey, Greenbaum's husband, works at the store, keeps up with new books and helps make recommendations.

Greenbaum derives a great satisfaction from helping people find books. "When people come back and say, 'Oh, that book was perfect for my aunt,' that's the joy," she said.